

Building a Seamless Network of the Nation's Ocean and Coastal Refuges, Reserves, Parks, and Sanctuaries

FY2007 Actionable Plan

Introduction

Ocean and coastal agencies must work together in this time of constraints on the federal budget, to create efficiencies and enhance their capacities to manage ocean and coastal resources. The Seamless Network Interagency General Agreement (Agreement) between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Department of Interior (DOI) will allow the agencies to attain greater results through exchange of financial and programmatic resources. Pursuant to the U.S. Ocean Action Plan, the Cooperative Conservation Executive Order, and the Subcommittee on Integrated Management of Ocean Resources (SIMOR) Work Plan, partner agencies will ensure full participation so that adequate resources and efforts will be devoted to developing and implementing the Interagency General Agreement.

The first year of implementation will focus on:

- 1) distribution of the Agreement to all affected regional and field units;
- 2) developing plans to address the priorities identified in the agreement;
- 3) conducting regional workshops to identify local priorities and projects, consistent with areas of focus identified by the partner agencies at the National Interagency Coordination Workshop held in August, 2005.

Element 1: Distribute the Interagency General Agreement

Each program will transmit the Agreement to the relevant regional and local field offices.

Milestone: 1st quarter

Element 2: Identify Points of Contact for Each Program

Within 60 days after signing the Agreement, each program will identify a point of contact at the national level for interagency coordination.

Milestone: 1st quarter

Element 3: Addressing Administrative and Financial Barriers to Collaboration

The agencies will explore how to coordinate and facilitate financial and administrative processes for the timely transfers of funds, sharing of facilities, vessels, equipment, personnel, and other resources. Lack of timely processes is the most frequent impediment to successful collaboration cited by agency field staff involved in partnerships. Pursuant to the Agreement, this element recommends the programs will immediately convene a select group of administrative and financial staff from DOI and NOAA, together with key site management staff, to articulate the issues and concerns, and make recommendations for timely and seamless coordination of these processes.

Milestone: 2nd quarter

Element 4: Identifying Site-Based and Regional Collaboration Priorities

The primary focus of the Interagency General Agreement is to support and facilitate site-based partnerships, particularly to enhance and expand existing collaborations. To do this effectively, the refuge, park, reserve and sanctuary managers and staff need to be fully engaged in identifying local/regional priorities for action. While ultimately this will need to be done throughout the US, in the first year, three or four regions will be selected and “regional priorities workshops” will be convened. These workshops will not only provide a venue for partner agency staff to come together develop new and nurture existing working relationships, but to help establish a common agenda for priority collaborations in that region. Regions where these workshops may be conducted include South Florida, California, the Pacific Northwest, and Pacific Islands.

Milestone: 2nd - 4th quarter

Element 5: Developing a Five-Year Plan for Collaboration

Several important issues were identified in the National Workshop that will need to be addressed in future years in order to facilitate successful partnerships. These include: operations coordination (share resources, facilities, personnel, training, equipment, co-locating offices); joint emergency response: groundings, oil spills, disasters; marine mammals stranding response, research and monitoring; law enforcement; marine habitat mapping and resource characterization; monitoring, observation, research; marine habitat restoration; marine invasive species; education, “in-reach”, outreach, ocean literacy; maritime heritage and submerged resources. Representatives from each partner agency (lead POCs) will consult with field and regional personnel to prioritize and develop ongoing, short-term objectives related to these goals, as well as develop a draft five-year implementation plan to guide future collaboration.

Milestone: 4th quarter

Element 6: Evaluate the Need for Including Additional Partners in the Collaboration

Participants at the Interagency Workshop identified the potential need to involve additional federal programs and coastal states in the seamless network partnership. During the first year, the points of contact for each of the programs will evaluate the need for or potential benefits of including additional partners, and how these additional partners might be most appropriately integrated into the collaboration.

Milestone: 4th quarter

Element 7: Meet to Evaluate the Progress Toward Implementing the Agreement

The Interagency General Agreement directs the points of contact to meet annually to evaluate the progress of implementation of the Agreement. A meeting to evaluate progress and draft an annual report on the collaboration will be completed in the first quarter of FY 08.

Milestone: 1st quarter FY 08